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ABSTRACT

The Center for the Study of Community Colleges has been studying humanities in community colleges nationwide. Surveys and site visits have been made to determine what factors are influencing the decline in humanities enrollments and what can be done to alter the trend. Humanities faculty surveys revealed a surprising lack of support of the humanities curriculum in general. As a whole humanities instructors do not read their professional literature, they do not write or attend professional meetings. One influencing factor may be the fear of being forced by declining enrollments to teach courses for which they are ill-prepared. Studies verified these enrollment declines and also investigated what courses were most affected, the number of faculty members in each discipline, the average class size, the amount of class time spent on various activities, teacher expectations and grading practices. The site visits have revealed that a small number of concerned instructors can make a big difference. The strength of the humanities was found to be only marginally related to community characteristics. Recommendations to strengthen the humanities include a change from differential funding patterns; humanities requirements in vocational programs; and most importantly faculty involvement. (AYC)

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Speech to Students and Staff, Higher Education Program, University of Miami, Coral Gables, Florida, January 27, 1978

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RESEARCH AND ADVOCACY IN THE HUMANITIES

Arthur M. Cohen

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

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You are fortunate to have the capable Ann Morey, who operates the Higher Education/Community College Program with such intelligence and such intensity. Dr. Morey invited me to the University, where 23 years ago this week I received a master's degree in history, to speak with you about some work we have been doing on community college futurism and on the humanities in community colleges. Last night I discussed community education and social mobility. Today I'm going to talk about the humanities. Last night's talk was based on a critical analysis of trends as revealed in the literature about community colleges. Today's talk stems from information that we have been collecting for the past three and one-half years under grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities. Different ways of gathering information; different problems; different conclusions.

We have been studying the humanities in community colleges nationwide. The Endowment staff asked us to do these studies because they are concerned with supporting the humanities in all areas of American life, and they wanted to know what is happening to the humanities in two-year colleges. It will come as no surprise to you--as it came as no surprise to them--that the humanities in community colleges are declining in both absolute and relative numbers. As I report this information, bear in mind that at the Center for the Study of Community Colleges are advocates

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for the humanities; that is, in addition to doing research on patterns of faculty involvement, curriculum, and instruction, we also make recommendations to bolster the humanities. I will account some of those as well.

The Endowment defines the humanities according to the academic disciplines in which they are embedded and transmitted: cultural anthropology and geography, history, foreign languages, political sciences, philosophy, literature, and art, music, and theater history and appreciation--19 disciplines in all. The Endowment excludes the performing arts because they are covered under the National Endowment for the Arts but includes the study and criticism of all art forms.

Our first task, undertaken in 1974, was a review of the literature about the humanities in two-year colleges. It was an extensive review, difficult to conduct because most of the information about humanities programs, faculty, and students is embedded in studies of community college programs generally, and much of the information about community colleges is aggregated with that of all higher education. Accordingly, it was quite difficult to find answers to simple questions such as "How many people teach the humanities in two-year colleges? How many students are there? How many courses?" Nonetheless, we reported what we could find and published the results in three monographs.

The first original data collection study we did was conducted in the spring of 1975. We very carefully sampled the 1,200 community colleges according to region, size, and type of organization and control. One hundred fifty-six colleges participated in the study. We included in the sample one-half the faculty, both full time and part time, in those colleges who were teaching one or more humanities courses. We

worked the survey rather vigorously, sending out an 11-page questionnaire, receiving an 84% response.

We learned a lot about the faculty: where they come from, what they wish they were doing, how they spend their time, what journals they read, what associations they belong to, how many hours they teach, what they would like to be doing five years hence. We arranged the information according to academic discipline and according to college type. A number of reports came from that study and were run out through disciplinary associations and through our book, The Two-Year College Instructor Today.

In 1977 we did a study on course patterning in the humanities. The sample of colleges was expanded to 178, again balanced by region, size, type of control and organization. We did not use the college catalogs to select courses but picked them from the class schedules because a catalog does not give a true picture of courses that are offered. In foreign languages, for example, the catalog may show German I, II, III, IV, Spanish I, II, III, IV, French I, II, III, IV, and so on, but the class reveals that only two sections of conversational Spanish are offered. We counted every class section from the schedules, using the catalogs only to verify course descriptions, and asked our contact at the college for enrollments in those classes in spring 1975 and spring 1977.

In the second portion of the 1977 study we addressed another questionnaire to the instructors asking how they taught their classes: what types of media they used, what kind of assistance is available to them, what their course goals are, the grading patterns they utilize, how many pages they require the students to read, what types of examinations

they give, the percent of class time spent in lecturing and other kinds of activities.

A current phase of the study has us visiting 20 colleges to try to find out what propels the humanities up or down in those institutions. We began the case study visits with the assumption that enrollments, courses, and effort expended on a particular area (in this case humanities) is a function of the intent of the people operating the institution. We do not believe that it is some mystical result of community desires or needs. We feel that community demands or student demands are very weak as curriculum influences in comparison with the demands of the professional operators of the institution. This is not to say that the institution should or should not be more responsive to the community, merely to point out that we feel the governing board, the administrators, and the faculty members make the curriculum.

We set out to test our assumption. We are visiting each of the 20 colleges, spending from four to six person days there, talking with everyone we can see: the president, all the deans, at least a couple of counselors, several faculty members in the humanities, everyone who is running a special program, the chairperson of the occupational area, the community service director. Using a structured interview schedule we ask them why what we have found to be happening is happening: Why are the humanities going up or down? Are you making special efforts to attract students to humanities courses? Can students get humanities credit without taking humanities courses? How many hours of humanities are required for graduation? What percent of students in humanities courses are enrolled in occupational programs? Who is being employed to teach the humanities? Is there any humanities content in the occupational

courses themselves? Is anyone on the board supportive of or antagonistic to the humanities? What resources are available to the humanities faculty?

We are now halfway through the case studies, having visited ten colleges. We have been pairing institutions where possible: two in Kansas, two in Florida, two in Illinois, two in Tennessee, so that we can neutralize the effect of state laws and policy statements that come out of state community college boards or state departments of education. We are trying to pick institutions where the humanities seem to be very strong or very weak based on types of courses and enrollments. We are going in and probing to find out what types of influences are at work. And we have reached some tentative conclusions.

Before talking about our conclusions from the case studies, let me go back to the faculty survey and comment about some of our findings. We began the survey believing that if there was one group on the campus that was going to be understanding and supportive of the humanities it would be the faculty. We didn't expect to find support across the board by presidents or deans because they have to be even-handed, applying equal treatment to all curriculum areas. But we did expect support from the people teaching the humanities. We were appalled at what we learned. The faculty act like battle-weary soldiers crouching down in the trenches. They tend not to be concerned with the humanities curriculum in general. At best they try to maintain their integrity as teachers of humanities in their own classrooms. But in many cases they have surrendered even that authority, abandoning their commitment to their academic disciplines. They tend not to read the literature in their field; they do not write; they do not attend professional meetings; they are unconcerned about the

ideas surrounding them and propelling their work. Not to say that all individuals fit the definition, only to point that as a characterization of the faculty as a whole, this is the tendency.

Why has this tendency come about? Part of the reason may be the community college faculty's roots in the secondary schools where suspicion of administrators, lack of concern with academic disciplines, and the practice of hiding behind classroom doors is the norm. Part of it may also be because the faculty feels betrayed; they came into the institutions to teach college-parallel courses but found themselves forced to do various types of remedial and developmental work with a student population they had not anticipated. And, part of it has to do with the local orientation of an instructor in an institution that is dedicated to serving a local populace. Part may also be due to their fear that they may be completely stopped from doing the job that they thought they were going to do. We have heard faculty members say, "I teach French. When languages were required I had 27 students in my class. Then they dropped the language requirements and my classes fell from 27 to 21, then 13, and this year I met my class and found seven students. What am I going to do? I won't have anyone left. They will make me teach something that I am ill-equipped to teach."

In reaction against these fears, the faculty have tried to protect themselves with a variety of work rules, contracts, collective bargaining agreements, fringe benefits, workload formulas. They have said in effect, "I can't handle the problem of curriculum and I have to protect myself." Maslow would have understood it; the humanities instructors are down to the level of physical safety. They have got to protect

themselves, and they are becoming very vigorous in defense of themselves and their positions in the institutions.

The data coming from our survey of enrollments confirms the faculty's fears. Between spring 1975 and spring 1977 enrollments in the colleges in our sample were up by 7.4%; enrollments in all humanities courses were down by 3%. Some disciplines showed drastic declines: cultural anthropology was down 10%; art history, down 6%; history, 8%; literature, 13%; music appreciation, 9%; philosophy, 8%. Only three of the disciplines in the humanities went against the trend: political science was up by 5%, probably because American government is still required in most colleges and because administration of justice programs are becoming more prevalent. Integrated humanities courses are up by 6% in enrollments with courses like Modern Culture and the Arts or Survey of the Humanities which integrate the art, music, philosophy, and literature of Western thought, cannibalizing enrollments from the specific courses. Foreign language enrollments went up by 9% with all the increase coming in Spanish and English as a Second Language. ESL was up 84% in two years and has now overtaken French for second place among community college language study. Spanish has more than half the enrollments in foreign languages. All other languages have declined markedly.

In actual numbers history still has the greatest enrollments, but it is dropping rapidly. Political science, including government and law, is in second place and closing rapidly. The foreign languages are third. Then comes literature, but that too is dropping and in time may be supplanted by the integrated humanities courses which are next in terms of enrollments. Philosophy, art history, music appreciation, cultural anthropology, and religious studies follow in proportion of enrollments among the humanities.

The number of faculty members teaching in these areas are somewhat different. Foreign languages is in third place in enrollments but has relatively fewer faculty members because there is very little crossover. Someone teaching Spanish and French would be counted as one instructor in the foreign languages. Similarly, history and political science are often paired. Literature, on the other hand, has a great number of instructors because most of the people teaching literature teach one course only and make the rest of their load in English composition.

We have some information from the class section survey as well. We can tell you that average enrollments per class section in the humanities stand at 28. The range is from a low of 19 students in the average foreign language class to a high of 37 students in the interdisciplinary humanities courses. Only 12 of 860 class sections that we sampled had 100 or more students enrolled; 54 of them had fewer than ten students enrolled (most of these were in foreign languages). The larger class sections tend to be taught by the faculty members with the most experience. Part timers and newcomers tend to teach smaller classes.

We learned about the amount of class time that instructors spend on various activities. They lecture 45% of the time; class discussion occupies 21% of class time; reproducible media are used 10% of the time while student verbal presentations take up 8% of the class time on average. (The foreign language classes are most likely to have verbal presentations; remove them from the sample and the average would drop well below 8%.) Quizzes and examinations take up another 8% of class time. There are other variations by discipline: the anthropology instructors tend to use films heavily; people in art history use slides and filmstrips; music appreciation instructors were unanimous in saying that they use audiotapes and cassettes and records frequently.

We were also concerned about the number of pages that instructors expect students to read. We have heard much talk, as indeed you have, about the decline in literacy and we wanted to verify how much reading is required. The average number of pages that instructors mandate their students to read in textbooks comes to 345 with most reading required in the literature and religious studies classes. The foreign languages are well below the norm in the number of pages they require. Around two-thirds of the instructors are well-satisfied with the texts; the others would like to change them. Half the instructors had total say in the selection of texts for their classes. The smaller colleges seem more inclined to allow instructors to select their own texts, hence small college instructors are more likely to be satisfied with those materials. Other required reading includes an average 110 pages in collections of readings in classes where these are utilized; 55 pages in reference books; 31 pages in magazine articles; and 13 pages in those classes that utilize newspapers.

Grading in the humanities classes is determined primarily by essay examinations and quick-score or objective tests, although 28% of the instructors rely heavily on papers written outside of class. Other activities are less likely to be emphasized in assigning grades to students: class discussions, 14%; papers written in class, 12%; oral recitation, 10%; regular class attendance, 10%; and field reports, workbook completion, and individual discussions with instructor to a lesser extent. There are many differences by discipline with the literature instructors most likely to be concerned with papers written outside of class, foreign language instructors least. The quick-score or objective test is most frequently seen in the anthropology, political science, and

music appreciation classes. Requiring regular class attendance as an important determinant of the student's grade is seen overwhelmingly in the music appreciation classes. More than three-fourths of the class sections are graded on an A, B, C, D, F scale; 16% on A, B, C/no credit. Pass/fail, pass/no credit, A, B, C/no credit grading practices are seen in only a few classes. The grading options other than A, B, C, D, F are practically never seen in the smaller institutions.

We asked the instructors what it would take to make their classes better. The overwhelming first choice was "availability of more media or instructional materials," with "instructor release time to develop course and/or materials," and "professional development opportunities for instructors," running a close second and third. More than one-third of the instructors chose those options. Practically none of the instructors felt that "fewer or no prerequisites for admission to class," would help, but 22% of them wanted stricter prerequisites. Twice as many (27%) wanted smaller classes as compared with those (13%) who felt that larger classes would be a benefit.

In spring 1975 we found 14% of the humanities instructors with the doctoral degree and predicted a rapid rate of increase reaching to 20-22% by 1980. In fall 1977 nearly 19% of the instructors held the doctorate; our prediction seems as though it will hold.

We are gathering some fascinating information in our on-site visits. One thing we have found, certainly no surprise to you, is that a small group of concerned instructors in the humanities can make a big difference. One vigorous instructor from literature or foreign languages--it doesn't matter where--can get together with two or three like-minded individuals and have a tremendous impact on the types of courses that are offered

and the number of students enrolled in them. Impact comes in a number of ways. Let me offer some examples. We went to one college where the humanities tended to be weak and asked about occupational programs. No humanities courses were required for occupational students, a student may get an associate in science degree without a humanities course, fulfilling his general education requirements in other areas. We went to another college in the same state where every occupational program required at least one humanities course. Some of the programs required an integrated humanities course while other programs required certain humanities electives.

What is happening? The colleges are less than 50 miles apart, operating in the same kind of environment and drawing students from the same types of socioeconomic backgrounds. The point is that in the institution where the humanities courses are required in every occupational program, there is a vigorous core of humanities instructors--the chairperson of the humanities department and five faculty members. The college has 11,000 students; the half dozen faculty members are not a big percentage of the instructors. However, they do their homework, build a very strong integrated humanities course, don't apologize for it, present it as a valuable course, and sell it in the curriculum committee. We spoke to the chairperson of the technical programs at that college who said that the programs in his area all have trade advisory councils, union and business people who advise on the programs. Frequently, he said, the advisory councils will recommend that the program drop the humanities requirement and fill the time with a particular skill such as typing. The chairperson of the occupational area takes that proposal to the curriculum committee, runs into that group of

humanities instructors, and goes back to his trades advisory committee saying that if they drop the humanities requirement they will lose the degree. That's what a vigorous humanities faculty can do. And by the way, the general statewide requirement is six units in humanities but that college has a nine-unit requirement--50% more is a lot when you are talking about enrollment, funds, and staffing.

The other institution close by had humanities instructors who tended to be withdrawn, bitter, reclusive, and hostile. They didn't think much of each other. They perceived themselves as being under a great deal of pressure. They couldn't even change a textbook. We asked why and they said it was a collegewide decision and that they had no input to the college councils. They said they couldn't even get past their own department and get the people there to agree that the text should be changed. They perceived the administration as being antagonistic. Yet we talked to the president who said he cared about the humanities. We don't know which came first: the fact that they can't even agree among themselves on changing a textbook or the perceived hostility coming from the administration.

In sum, we are finding that the strength of the humanities in the institution is only marginally related to the community in which the institution is located. We are going to attempt to verify that contention in a number of other ways, for example, by running the enrollment and curriculum data for the 20 case study colleges against other colleges of their type so that we can match small rural institutions, large urban centers, and so forth. But we have seen that the humanities depend considerably more on characteristics of the institution than they do on the types of people in the community. If the humanities instructors put

together a course called, "Humanities in a Technological Society," and make it pertinent to occupational students, the trades advisory committees may grumble but the students take it and may gain much from the course.

As I said at the outset, we are advocates in addition to being educational researchers. We are making recommendations to a number of agencies. We have discussed our findings with staff members at the National Endowment for the Humanities and suggested program revisions. The Endowment is becoming much more sensitive to the problems of the humanities in the community colleges. We are also making recommendations to state directors of community college education and to administrator groups. We are speaking to faculty members, too; we have made presentations to the National Humanities Faculty meetings in Miami, Kansas City, Los Angeles, and Atlanta. We have been to meetings of deans of instruction and of humanities division chairpersons. We have spoken to disciplinary associations; I was at a meeting of the American Philological Association in Washington two years ago, a group of classists that don't even know what the community college is. And, that talk led to a half-page article in the Washington Star.

We are making different kinds of recommendations to the different groups, all with the intent of strengthening the humanities. One of the things we are talking about at the state level is that differential funding patterns tend to be very debilitating. If a community college in Illinois receives $17 per student per credit hour from the state for its enrollments in the humanities and $90 per student per credit hour for enrollments in the nursing programs, some messages are being transmitted about the value of one program over another. "Well," they say, "it costs more to teach nursing than it does to teach humanities."

Perhaps so, but why should that be the case? Traditionally, the humanities have been taught by one person in a room with a group of people sitting in chairs. The instructor's equipment includes a chalkboard and an eraser. To teach nursing you have to have a clinic with equipment and furnishings--an entirely different pattern of teaching. In automotive repair there must be machinery and tools. I have seen auto repair shops about twice as big as this room with a quarter of a million dollars worth of equipment in them. Yet the $17 per credit hour for humanities students can be made even cheaper; just put more people in the room.

Much of that attitude is a result of a long history of the faculty teaching humanities who really believe that that is all that is necessary. Why don't the faculty in music appreciation say, "In order to learn to appreciate music each of my students has to have his own stereo set and a couple of hundred records, and the college should buy it for him." Why don't the faculty in art history say, "Our students should have funds to travel to museums to see the original works." Why shouldn't the anthropology instructors say, "We can't teach anthropology unless our students are paid to travel to archaelogical digs." The political science instructors could insist that if students are going to learn the way decisions are really made in government they have to apprentice to bureaucrats in commissions and agencies, that they can't learn government by studying the tripartite system of checks and balances on the national level, that that's not where government decisions are made.

A similar contention can be made for every discipline within the humanities. The point is that the instructors traditionally have been wrapped up in a different mode of thinking. They think that all they need is a group of students with them in a classroom. And so, the

nursing educators get the clinics, the automotive repair programs get the equipment, and the humanities instructors get chalkdust on their pants. I don't think that we are going to have much success getting the state boards to change those funding formulas. The perception that it costs more to teach career programs than it does to teach the humanities is very deeply set with the public, the administrators, and with the faculty themselves.

We have been recommending to the humanities instructors that they organize lay advisory committees to their programs the way the occupational educators have done. The humanities advocates need a lay advisory committee to come in and offer curricular advice. They also need contacts with the public for program support, for student recruiting, for student placements. The presidents could organize those committees very easily, but they tend not to. The humanities instructors themselves must do it. They need the community connection. They need a group to champion their cause when the humanities course requirements come under attack as they so frequently do. They need a group to tell them where their students can find meaningful employment. These advisory committees can be comprised of laymen who are concerned with the humanities: a local museum director, librarians, newspaper reporters, radio and television personalities, even corporation executives who have a dilettantish interest in the humanities. Every community has such people; it remains for the humanities instructors to seek them out and involve them in discussions of the program. Many of the presidents we have spoken to cannot even identify a person on their faculty who is particularly concerned with the humanities program; they will say, "Oh yes, there is Miss Smith in literature or Mr. Jones in Spanish," but they have no idea of what's going on in a

broad programmatic sense. If there were a lay advisory committee closely affiliated with the humanities programs, they might be more inclined to notice.

I have recounted some of the work we have been doing with the humanities in community colleges nationwide. We have much data, we are making many other recommendations, and we have issued many reports, some of them noted on the flyer prepared by the ERIC Clearinghouse for Junior Colleges. These reports are available to you. Just write for them. We have learned much, and we plan to continue working in the area for a while longer. But we can only do so much. Much depends on the instructors themselves. If the humanities are to survive the faculty must take a broader view. They simply cannot remain behind their classroom doors concerned only with protecting themselves and the few students they have remaining.

There will always be a place for the instructor who wants to conduct his professional life in a room with a few students, talking about something that interests him very much--whether it's Plato or the Renaissance. The work rules that have arisen to protect instructors will allow them to adopt just about whatever role they want to adopt. There will always be a chalkboard and seven students who will want to listen. However, we are talking about a different role, a different way of viewing instruction in the community colleges. We feel that the humanities deserve a place in the colleges and that the instructors who teach the humanities must work to keep them there. They must get out of their classrooms, form their support groups, become active on the curriculum committees, rewrite their courses, write instructional materials,

build portions of their courses especially for the kinds of students they have. This cannot be done by a reclusive group; it takes a vigorous, committed set of instructors. No one is going to do it for them.

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